AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

- 1. (Canceled)
- 2. (Currently Amended) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim [[1]] <u>23</u>, which satisfy the following formula (2):

$$10 \le L/D \le 50 \tag{2}$$

wherein

D indicates the mean thickness (μ m) of the fibers; and

L indicates the length (μ m) of the major side of the cross section of the fibers.

- 3. (Currently Amended) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim [[1]] 23, wherein one end or both ends of the extremely flattened cross-sectional profile of the fibers are branched.
- 4. (Currently Amended) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim [[1]] $\underline{23}$, which contain from 0.01 to 30 % by mass of a layered compound having a mean particle size of from 0.01 to 30 μ m.
- 5. (Withdrawn-Currently Amended) A method for producing a dry-process nonwoven fabric, which comprises:

applying a water jet of 30 kg/cm^2 or more to a web that contains the fibers of claim [[1]] $\underline{23}$, or

needle-punching the web to a punching density of at least 250 kg/cm² to thereby fibrillate the fibers.

6. (Withdrawn) The method as claimed in claim 5, wherein said fibers satisfy the following formula (2):

$$10 \le L/D \le 50 \tag{2}$$

wherein

D indicates the mean thickness (μ m) of the fibers; and

L indicates the length (μ m) of the major side of the cross section of the fibers.

- 7. (Withdrawn) The method as claimed in claim 5, wherein one end or both ends of the extremely flattened cross-sectional profile of the fibers are branched.
- 8. (Withdrawn) The method as claimed in claim 5, wherein said fibers contain from 0.01 to 30 % by mass of a layered compound having a mean particle size of from 0.01 to 30 μ m.
- 9. (Previously Presented) A dry-process nonwoven fabric obtained according to the method of claim 5.
- 10. (Previously Presented) The nonwoven fabric as claimed in claim 9, wherein said fibers satisfy the following formula (2):

$$10 \le L/D \le 50 \tag{2}$$

wherein

D indicates the mean thickness (μ m) of the fibers which is a mean length (μ m) of the minor side of the cross section of the fibers; and

L indicates the length (μ m) of the major side of the cross section of the fibers.

- 11. (Previously Presented) The nonwoven fabric as claimed in claim 9, wherein one end or both ends of the extremely flattened cross-sectional profile of the fibers are branched.
- 12. (Previously Presented) The nonwoven fabric as claimed in claim 9, which contain from 0.01 to 30 % by mass of a layered compound having a mean particle size of from 0.01 to 30 μ m.
- 13. (Withdrawn-Currently Amended) A method for producing a wet-process waterjet nonwoven fabric, which comprises:

applying a water jet of 30 kg/cm² or more to base paper prepared from a slurry that contains the fibers of claim [[1]] <u>23</u> as a part of the fibrous component thereof, to thereby fibrillate the fibers.

14. (Withdrawn) The method as claimed in claim 13, wherein said fibers satisfy the following formula (2):

$$10 \le L/D \le 50 \tag{2}$$

wherein

D indicates the mean thickness (μ m) of the fibers; and

L indicates the length (μ m) of the major side of the cross section of the fibers.

- 15. (Withdrawn) The method as claimed in claim 13, wherein one end or both ends of the extremely flattened cross-sectional profile of the fibers are branched.
- 16. (Withdrawn) The method as claimed in claim 13, wherein said fibers contain from 0.01 to 30 % by mass of a layered compound having a mean particle size of from 0.01 to 30 μ m.
 - 17. (Previously Presented) A wet-process nonwoven fabric obtained according to the method of claim 13.
- 18. (Previously Presented) The nonwoven fabric as claimed in claim 17, wherein said fibers satisfy the following formula (2):

$$10 \le L/D \le 50 \tag{2}$$

wherein

D indicates the mean thickness (μ m) of the fibers which is a mean length (μ m) of the minor side of the cross section of the fibers; and

L indicates the length (μ m) of the major side of the cross section of the fibers.

- 19. (Previously Presented) The nonwoven fabric as claimed in claim 17, wherein one end or both ends of the extremely flattened cross-sectional profile of the fibers are branched.
- 20. (Previously Presented) The nonwoven fabric as claimed in claim 17, wherein said fibers contain from 0.01 to 30 % by mass of a layered compound having a mean particle size of from 0.01 to 30 μ m.

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- 21. (Canceled)
- 22. (Canceled)
- 23. (Previously Presented) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers having an extremely flattened cross-sectional profile and having a mean thickness D (μ m) that satisfies the following formula (1):

$$0.4 \le D \le 5 \tag{1},$$

wherein

D = S/L;

D indicates the mean thickness (μ m) of the fibers which is a mean length (μ m) of the minor side of the cross section of the fibers;

S indicates the cross-section area (μm^2) of the fibers; and

L indicates the length (μ m) of the major side of the cross section of the fibers; wherein said polyvinyl alcohol fibers consist of polyvinyl alcohol.

24. (Previously Presented) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers having an extremely thinly flattened cross-sectional profile and having a mean thickness D (μ m) that satisfies the following formula (1):

$$0.4 \le D \le 5 \tag{1},$$

wherein

D = S/L;

D indicates the mean thickness (μ m) of the fibers which is a mean length (μ m) of the minor side of the cross section of the fibers;

S indicates the cross-section area (μ m²) of the fibers; and

L indicates the length (μ m) of the major side of the cross section of the fibers; wherein said polyvinyl alcohol fibers consist of polyvinyl alcohol.

25-26. (Canceled)

27. (New) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim 24, which satisfy the following formula (2):

$$10 \le L/D \le 50 \tag{2}$$

wherein

D indicates the mean thickness (μ m) of the fibers; and

L indicates the length (μ m) of the major side of the cross section of the fibers.

- 28. (New) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim 24, wherein one end or both ends of the extremely flattened cross-sectional profile of the fibers are branched.
- 29. (New) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim 24, which contain from 0.01 to 30 % by mass of a layered compound having a mean particle size of from 0.01 to 30 μ m.
- 30. (New) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim 24, wherein one end or both ends of the extremely flattened cross-sectional profile of the fibers are branched.
- 31. (New) Polyvinyl alcohol fibers as claimed in claim 24, wherein said fibers contain from 0.01 to 30 % by mass of a layered compound having a mean particle size of from 0.01 to 30 μ m.